"Poetry is the best words in the best order." Samuel Taylor Coleridge said it first, back in the early 1800s—and it remains pretty clear that a genuinely successful poem can have less to do with an "interesting idea" or a "good premise" than it does with choosing the perfect words for expressing it.

This poetry workshop will focus on finding exactly the right words and phrases for your poems-in-progress—words that will help you forge your most unforgettable poetry to date. Revealing exercises will have you delving deep into your own vocabulary while simultaneously taking advantage of the enormous variety of synonyms that the English language offers. We'll play a little fast-and-loose with syntax, as well, to ensure that your words are making the strongest impression on the reader that they possibly can.

The goal? To make certain that a few of those unforgettable poems you’ve been thinking about for so long will finally get written!

SYLLABUS

No question about it: poets like us—and by this I simply mean poets who are writing primarily in English—are, without a doubt, the luckiest poets in the world (forgive me, Barbra Streisand). And I make this claim not because English happens to be my native tongue, nor even because it’s spoken and understood by so many around the world; rather, because of the extraordinary depth and variety of its vocabulary. The result: an amazing supply of potential synonyms for poets to choose from. Thanks to wholesale borrowings from French, Latin, and Greek-- and to a lesser extent from Portuguese, Hindi, Spanish, Dutch and the Scandinavian languages-- English wins first prize for sheer word-count, hands down. How many words in all? The Oxford English Dictionary estimates about 500,000 plus another half-million technical and scientific terms. In comparison, German has only about 185,000, and French a paltry 100,000.

So now that you’re armed with this knowledge, narrow your eyes and take a good long look at the poems you’ve written recently. If you see signs that you’re been settling too often for the predictable, the bland, or even the clichéd, you’ve come to the right place for taking care of that. In a supportive, constructive workshop setting, we will be focusing on finding exactly the right words and phrases for your poems-in-progress-- words that will help you forge your most effective poetry to date. The goal? To make certain that a few of those unforgettable poems you’ve been thinking about for so long will finally get written!
Here’s what we’ll cover:

**MONDAY:** Ways to wake up a hibernating vocabulary  
- How to wreck a perfectly good poem  
- Hands-on experiments that prove the point  
**Assignment for tomorrow:** Write a poem in which every word counts (specifics to come).

**TUESDAY:** Writing with one hand tied behind your back  
- The abecedarian  
- The lipogram  
- The acrostic  
**Workshop Monday’s assignment**  
**Assignment for tomorrow:** Write a poem with impossible restrictions.

**WEDNESDAY:** Creating emotional landscapes  
- In-class: some mood-altering experiments  
**Workshop Tuesday’s assignment**  
**Assignment for tomorrow:** Write a celebratory poem.

**THURSDAY:** *Me Talk Pretty One Day*:*  the elusive art of translation  
- The two primary approaches to translating from another language  
- Examples galore  
**Workshop Wednesday’s assignment**  
**Assignment for tomorrow:** Create a translation.

**FRIDAY:** Wrap-up  
**Workshop Thursday’s assignment (translations)**  
**Catch-up workshop?**  
- If time: Collaborative poems, or *Hey, we’re all in this together!*  
*Apologies to David Sedaris*

Marilyn L. Taylor, Ph.D., former Poet Laureate of the state of Wisconsin (2009 and 2010) and of the city of Milwaukee (2004 and 2005), is the author of six collections of poetry. Her award-winning poems and essays have appeared in many anthologies and journals, including *Poetry, The American Scholar, Able Muse, Measure*, Ted Kooser’s “American Life in Poetry” column, and the recent Random House anthology titled *Villanelles*. Marilyn also served for five years as Contributing Editor and regular poetry columnist for *The Writer* magazine. She is currently a member of the Wisconsin Poet Laureate Commission and the Council for Wisconsin Writers Board of Directors. She recently moved from Milwaukee to Madison, where she continues to write and teach.

**Credit Option:** Participants earn 1 credit by attending class and completing the assigned work for the week: daily reading, writing at least five pages of original work, and critiquing of own and others’ work. To earn 2 credits, participants submit an additional five pages of their poetry. Participants earning 3 credits complete all of the above requirements supplemented by another five to 10 pages of poetry or a short paper synthesizing how the material covered during the week applies to their own creative projects and/or teaching. The work must be handed in within two weeks of final class date.